

LIII.—*Remarks on Mr. A. NEWTON's "Suggestions for forming Collections of Birds' Eggs*"*.

"THERE's life in the old land yet!" was our involuntary exclamation, when, on taking up Mr. Newton's pamphlet, we found that though our grandchildren in the New World and at the Antipodes are thought capable of instructing their aged parent in the use of the ballot-box, yet their grandmother still knows how to teach them to suck eggs.

We learn from Mr. Newton, that, before the appearance of his work from an English press, he had already given 3000 lessons to our Yankee cousins in the art and 'mysterie' of sucking eggs. We might have been captious with our valued friend for not giving ourselves the first benefit of his instructions; for, so far as our acquaintance with British collections enables us to form a judgment, we think his lessons are still much needed at home. But probably his modesty induced him to believe them superfluous, at least for the readers of the 'Ibis,' and we can only rejoice that his 'Suggestions' are now accessible to all.

To our late and deeply-lamented coadjutor, Mr. Wolley, Mr. Newton attributes the chief merits of his 'Suggestions'; but certainly no apology was required for them from one, whose collection now stands indisputably at the head of the oological museums of the world.

We cannot too emphatically repeat the remark in Mr. Newton's preface, that "if the study of Natural History is to be much benefited by an extended knowledge of Oology, it is of the utmost importance that our knowledge of it should rest on a firm and truthful basis, and this end can only be obtained by unremitting caution and scrupulousness on the part of egg-collectors." Again, "The main points to be attended to, as being those by which science can alone be benefited, are IDENTIFICATION and AUTHENTICATION." To each of these topics Mr. Newton devotes a distinct section, and their importance cannot be too strongly impressed upon all collectors. It is melancholy to see what sums of money and simple zeal are

* "*Suggestions for forming Collections of Birds' Eggs.* By Alfred Newton, M.A., Fellow of Magdalen College, Cambridge, &c." London: E. Newman, 1860.

often squandered on the most worthless accumulations from the shops of dealers. In too many instances, especially with respect to so-called *British* collections, the class of dealers have exercised the most pernicious influence, destroying confidence and giving false impressions from the basest motives. We should not like to repeat here a painfully true remark of our late friend Mr. Wolley on this subject. As an instance, and by no means an uncommon one, of what is meant, we have seen an elegant cabinet beautifully fitted up and supplied by a London dealer to order for a lady much interested in natural history. This cabinet professed to contain a specimen or two of the egg of every British bird, with the two exceptions of the Swallow-tailed Kite and Great Auk. These two were probably omitted to give an air of authenticity to the rest. We looked through the cabinet. The first two drawers taught us how largely the Raptorial are indebted to the aberrant tendencies of the poultry-yard. The class can no longer be defended from the vengeance of the fowl-fancier. It would be only tedious to relate how strong was the generic affinity of the White's Thrush and Gold-vented Thrush with our Mavis and Blackbird, how close the connexion between the Waxwing and the Shrike, or how the whole of the *Scolopacinae* must have left their eggs under charge of the Snipe and the Redshank. But beyond the barefaced robbery of such a system is a yet greater evil in the erroneous ideas propagated by such collections, which, were Mr. Newton's principles universally adopted, would be effectually corrected.

On *Identification*, our author remarks the necessity in most countries of obtaining specimens of the parent bird by shooting, snaring, or trapping. We hope, however, he does not intend to urge this course in every instance, else we should indeed be waging a war of cruel extermination. It is necessary to do it occasionally; but we would really suggest more mercy than our friend seems inclined to show, and would refer him *sometimes* to the Levitical law on the subject. Suppose, for instance, a collector to be in a district where Cetti's Warbler breeds. When he has satisfied himself of one nest, what possible occasion can there be for a further massacre of the innocents in the case of subsequent nests? We would add here, that we have always, in

the case of passerine birds, found horsehair nooses placed on the nest the easiest and most satisfactory mode of identification, and one that greatly economizes the collector's time. We are glad Mr. Newton has mentioned Mr. Hancock's method of preserving birds by a few drops of pyroligneous acid in the mouth and vent, a recipe we have ourselves proved with success in warm climates.

On *Authentication*, our author presses the "writing in ink on the shells not only the name of the species to which each belongs, but also, as far as the space will admit, as many particulars relating to the amount of identification to which the specimen was subjected, the locality where, the date when, and name of the person by whom they were taken, adding always a reference to the journal or note-book of the collector, wherein fuller details may be given." The local name only should be used for eggs brought in by natives; or if the scientific name be added, it should be in brackets; thus, "Tooglee Aiah (*Squatarola helvetica*)."

[We wish Mr. Newton would tell us in confidence whence we could get Tooglee-aiiah brought in to our own collection.] The importance of each collector adding his initials or monogram to all eggs taken by himself is not forgotten.

Another section is devoted to the description of egg-blowing implements, and three pages are partially occupied by figures of weapons which we should be sorry to show to a nervous lady on her way to the dentist, and which might teach a presumptuous grandchild that it is no light affair to suck eggs. Let not, however, the tyro imagine that he must expend a fortune at the surgical instrument maker's. The implements are simple, though some of them we should be inclined to reckon among the oologist's 'articles de luxe.' With a pin, a straw or blowpipe, an old rat-tailed file, a pair of fine-pointed scissors and a penknife, very workmanlike specimens can be turned out. Still every regular collector will find a use for each implement figured by Mr. Newton; but in egg-blowing, as in many other things, more depends on the workman than on the tools. We had rather trust a chipping egg to the manipulation of a certain well-known, though young, ornithologist with his pin and penknife, than to many others with a whole armoury of instruments. We

can heartily second Mr. Newton's advice to have handles to the drills.

The section on the preparation of specimens contains many useful hints, the very simplicity of which has led them to be forgotten till after many a lesson of bitter experience; such, *e. g.* as keeping the egg from the light while drying, holding it over a basin of water while operating, the proper method of packing safely, &c. How many a collector has groaned on the reception of a box packed with sawdust! At page 12 we have an admirable method given for strengthening hard-set eggs during the process of emptying their contents. We may, perhaps, venture to add our regret that Mr. Newton should have tolerated by any suggestion, while he most justly condemns, the semibarbarous *two-hole* system.

The concluding observations contain many valuable hints on identification and the methods of attaining it. The field naturalist must never forget that the more closely species approach each other, the more important as well as the more difficult is identification. For this reason we always admired the nerve with which a worthy fellow-traveller used ruthlessly to smash every unidentified capture, and can re-echo his exclamation, "An identified duck is the most valuable of eggs!"

We can only now most heartily thank Mr. Newton for his lesson both to grandmother and grandchildren in blowing eggs, and hope that he will follow up his suggestions by other *brochures* on the arrangement of cabinets, and the collection of skeletons or portions of skeletons, a subject on which none can speak with more authority.

LIV.—Recent Ornithological Publications.

1. ENGLISH PUBLICATIONS.

AMONG the "Zoological Notes from Aneiteum in the New Hebrides," by Mr. J. MacGillivray, in the August number of 'The Zoologist,' is a description of a supposed new species of Petrel (*Procellaria torquata*), allied to *P. cookii* and *P. mollis*. This bird breeds in Aneiteum "in burrows in the wooded moun-